

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 COME-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EB-08
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00
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O R 080832Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5908
INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TOKYO 3742

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, US, JA
SUBJECT: JAPANESE ELECTION PROSPECTS AND FUKUDA'S WASHINGTON VISIT

SUMMARY. IT IS COMMON WISDOM THAT PRIMIN FUKUDA WOULD
LIKE TO ASSURE HIS CONTINUATION IN OFFICE BEYOND DECEMBER
BY CALLING LOWER HOUSE ELECTION BEFORE THEN. INASMUCH
AS MOST LIKELY SCENARIO CALLS FOR LOWER HOUSE DISSOLU-
TION IN MAY AND JUNE ELECTION, "SUCCESSFUL" WASHINGTON
SUMMIT IS REGARDED AS DISSOLUTION PRECONDITION. ALTHOUGH
STRONG OPPOSITION TO DISSOLUTION WITHIN LDP IS CERTAIN,
ODDS ON JUNE ELECTION APPEAR SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN EVEN.
END SUMMARY.

1. FUKUDA CLEARLY WANTS TO CALL AN ALECTION AS SOON AS
HE CAN. ALONG WITH MANY OTHERS, HE EXPECTS HIS LIBERAL
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DEMOCRATIC PARTY (LDP) TO REGAIN SEATS LOST IN LOCKHEED
SCANDAL'S WAKE. (MANY LDP CANDIDATES WERE RUNNERS-UP
IN DECEMBER 1976, SOME BY ONLY HANDFUL OF VOTES.) HE
IS ALSO AWARE THAT ONLY TWO POSTWAR JAPANESE PREMIERS
HAVE FAILED TO GO TO PEOPLE, AND BOTH HAVE BEEN JUDGED
WEAK. MORE TO POINT, FUKUDA'S CALLING OF SUCCESSFUL
ELECTION WOULD GUARANTEE HIS DECEMBER REELECTION AS LDP

PRESIDENT AND CONTINUATION AS PRIME MINISTER. FOR THAT REASON, HOWEVER, LDP SEC GEN OHIRA, ODDS-ON FAVORITE TO SUCCEED FUKUDA, WOULD LIKE TO AVOID ELECTION IF AT ALL POSSIBLE.

2. ALTHOUGH NOT LEGALLY REQUIRED, LOWER HOUSE IS CUSTOM-ARILY IN SESSION AT TIME OF DISSOLUTION. THERE SHOULD ALSO BE A DECENT INTERVAL BEFORE SCHEDULED DEC. 1 LDP PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION TO AVOID CHARGES OF ATTEMPTING TO PREORDAIN ITS OUTCOME. TYPICALLY, ABOUT 30 DAYS ELAPSE BETWEEN DISSOLUTION AND THE CUSTOMERY SUNDAY ELECTION DAY; AN ADDITIONAL 5-10 DAYS ARE REQUIRED TO ORGANIZE NEW GOVERNMENT.

3. WITHIN THESE PARAMETERS, MAY DISSOLUTION-JUNE ELECTION AND SEPTEMBER DISSOLUTION-OCTOBER ELECTION POSSIBILITIES HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED. (AN EARLY JUNE WASHINGTON SUMMIT WOULD HAVE MADE POST-SUMMIT ELECTION ALL BUT IMPOSSIBLE INASMUCH AS DIFFICULT-TO-OBTAIN DIET EXTENSION WOULD HAVE BEEN REQUIRED AND 40 DAYS NECESSARY FOR ELECTION AND GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION COULD NOT HAVE BEEN SQUEEZED IN COMFORTABLY BEFORE MID-JULY BONN ECONOMIC SUMMIT.) WITH SCHEDULING OF WASHINGTON SUMMIT FOR MAY 3, SPECULATION IS RIFE ABOUT MAY DISSOLUTION, STRENGTHENED BY MEDIA DISCOVERY OF TWO-MONTH "GAP" IN FUKUDA'S POLITICAL SCHEDULE BETWEEN MID-MAY DIET END AND MID-JULY BONN SUMMIT.

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4. LATE SPRING LOWER HOUSE DISSOLUTION WOULD ALSO BE EASIER TO BRING OFF THAN DISSOLUTION IN FALL. PRIMIN FUKUDA AND HIS SUPPORTERS COULD ARGUE THAT, GIVEN UNCERTAINTY OF ECONOMIC PROSPECTS, LDP SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF INITIAL PUBLIC-WORKS SPENDING IMPACT, WHICH WILL ALREADY BE APPARENT EVEN IN JAPAN'S COLDEST REGIONS BY LATE MAY, WHEREAS LATER TIMING WOULD RUN RISK OF LESS FAVORABLE ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE. OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE ALSO NOW IN EXTRA-ORDINARY STATE OF DISARRAY OR UNPREPAREDNESS AND DELAY WOULD WORK TO LDP DISADVANTAGE. DISSOLUTION COULD BE BILLED AS REQUEST FOR POPULAR SUPPORT OF STRONG US-JAPAN TIES ON HEELS OF SUCCESSFUL WASHINGTON SUMMIT. ON ASSUMPTION ADDITIONAL DIET SEATS WOULD BE WON, EARLIER ELECTION WOULD ALSO EASE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS' DIET MANAGEMENT BURDEN THAT MUCH SOONER.

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5. LDP SEC GEN OHIRA AND THOSE OPPOSED, ON OTHER HAND,
ARE ALMOST CERTAIN TO STRESS LACK OF JUSTIFICATION FOR
DISSOLUTION, UNCERTAINTY OF ELECTION PROSPECTS, AND
NEED TO CONCENTRATE ALL ENERGIES ON IMPROVING ECONOMIC
SITUATION. BUSINESSMEN GENERALLY SHARE THIS VIEW AND,
ALTHOUGH THEY WOULD BE FORCED TO GO ALONG IF AN ELECTION
WERE CALLED, THEY WOULD CERTAINLY PREFER TO AVOID AN ELECTION.

6. INTRA-LDP DISAGREEMENT OVER DESIRABILITY OF DIET
DISSOLUTION IS THUS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN, BUT FUKUDA, IF
DETERMINED, HAS STRONGER POSITION. ALTHOUGH CABINET
APPROVAL OF DECISION IS REQUIRED, IT IS PRIMIN'S
PREROGATIVE TO DISSOLVE DIET. MOREOVER, IF THERE WERE
DISSIDENTS AMONG HIS CABINET MINISTERS, HE COULD REPLACE
THEM. IT IS ALSO LIKELY THAT OHIRA, HOWEVER MUCH HE
DISAGREES, WOULD ULTIMATELY FEEL COMPELLED TO GO ALONG
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TO RETAIN FUKUDA'S SUPPORT FOR HIS EVENTUAL SUCCESSION.
FUKUDA'S HAND WOULD ALSO BE STRENGTHENED BY ELECTION
MOOD, WHICH COULD BUILD OVER NEXT TWO MONTHS. BEFORE
FINAL DISSOLUTION DECISION, HOWEVER, FUKUDA'S RESOLVE
WILL BE SEVERELY TESTED BY OHIRA AND THOSE OPPOSED.

THEY ARE LIKELY, FOR EXAMPLE, TO HARP ON THEME THAT FUKUDA PUTS PERSONAL POLITICAL FORTUNES AHEAD OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, THERE REMAINS DISTINCT POSSIBILITY THAT FUKUDA, DESPITE STRENGTH OF HIS POSITION, WILL DECIDE TO WAIT, IN HOPE OF MORE FAVORABLE CIRCUMSTANCES LATER.

7. DISSOLUTION/ELECTION CONJECTURE IS BASED IMPORTANTLY ON ASSUMPTION OF OUR WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE IN A "SUCCESSFUL" WASHINGTON VISIT BY FUKUDA. FUKUDA'S SPOKESMEN HAVE TALKED IN TERMS OF HIS GOING TO WASHINGTON TO "REPAIR" STRAINS IN US-JAPANESE RELATIONS, RECONFIRM STRAUSS-USHIBA AGREEMENT, EXPLAIN CURRENT ECONOMIC EFFORTS, AND EXPRESS HOPES FOR THEIR SUCCESS. (THIS IN ADDITION TO DISCUSSIONS OF ASIAN POLITICAL/SECURITY SITUATION, SINO-JAPANESE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP TREATY, ETC.) FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS (AS WELL AS TO PREPARE FOR BONN SUMMIT), JAPANESE WOULD AIM AT MINIMIZING US-JAPAN DIFFERENCES, WHILE SEEKING TO UNDERScore STRENGTH AND HEALTH OF PARTNERSHIP. IF, ON OTHER HAND, VISIT WERE NOT SUCCESSFUL IN THESE TERMS, FUKUDA WOULD AGAIN BE OPEN TO CHARGES OF "MISMANAGING" US-JAPAN RELATIONSHIP AND DISSOLUTION WOULD BECOME HIGHLY UNLIKELY.

8. WE WOULD EXPECT TOP GOJ AND LDP LEADERS TO CONTINUE PUBLICLY TO DENY DISSOLUTION POSSIBILITY, IF ONLY TO ENCOURAGE LOWER HOUSE MEMBERS TO STAY IN TOKYO FOR DIET
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DELIBERATIONS. IT IS OUR JUDGMENT, HOWEVER, THAT MAY DISSOLUTION/JUNE ELECTION ODDS ARE NOW SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN EVEN AND COULD GROW IF ELECTION MOOD GATHERS MOMENTUM.
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